

Sunday 13th June 2021

This short act of worship has been prepared for you to use while you are unable to attend worship in a church building.

Call to Worship

Give praise to the Lord. Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice

Hymn StF 18

Be still and know that I am God.
Be still and know that I am God.
Be still and know that I am God.

I am the Lord that healeth thee.
I am the Lord that healeth thee.
I am the Lord that healeth thee.

In thee, O Lord I put my trust.
In thee, O Lord, I put my trust.
In thee, O Lord I put my trust.
Anonymous -based on Psalm 46:10-11

Prayer

Glory be to you maker of the universe.
You created this beautiful planet;
Set it in the skies and made the sun to warm it
and bring light by day, and the moon and the stars
to shine at night.
You create every kind of creature on land or sea
or air;
You clothe this planet with a multitude of plant
species;
You place us in this glorious garden where we are
sustained in body, mind and spirit by your infinite
generosity.
Yet despite the magnitude of your glorious works,
in and beyond our small corner of the cosmos,
you are closer to us than is our own breathing.
Glory be to you maker of the universe.

Reading - Mark 4:26-34

The Parable of the Growing Seed

He also said, 'The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come.'

The Parable of the Mustard Seed

He also said, 'With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.'

Message

Today we hear Jesus speaking in parables, as he so often does, to explain the kingdom of heaven. He does this because there is no adequate language to explain the kingdom of heaven.....even the term Kingdom is a metaphor!

But let's begin there, with the Kingdom, because one really important snippet that Jesus tells us in Luke 17:21 is that the Kingdom of God is within you. We don't always think of it like this though because we have had so much teaching that implies God is separate from us, remote and distant, sometimes even suggestive of an old man in the sky (which is really not a good metaphor at all).

Jesus though is much more concerned that we develop an understanding of not just the transcendent God but also the immanent God. The God that is ever present within us, around us, in all things and through all things. If we think of the Cosmic Christ 'All things came into being through Him and without him not one thing came into being' (John 1:3), then we see that there is something of God imbued in all that lives...

Christian mystics have described it (and we are back to metaphors again) as a spark or a seed or a divine potential **within** every human soul that when awakened, it grows and subtly transforms our entire way of being. St Paul was transformed in this way over time and finally came to say... 'it's no longer I that live but Christ that lives in me.'

This awakening to the inner Christ is a big step on our Christian journey but it is true that it is a challenging step. 'Being asleep' (another metaphor) defines our lives when the drives and desires of the ego are dominant and this is not easy to let go of.

Do you remember at the start of the pandemic there were 2 narratives that were playing out in the media. Firstly there were stories of kindness abounding as people were so inspired to help in whatever way they could to enable people to get through the pandemic. The second narrative was that of the empty shelves in the supermarkets as people were driven by a 'me first' egoic drive fearing that their very survival was on the line. And these point precisely to the 2 natures that sit within us.

The first is that Christ essence (or seed) that is longing to be given birth to in the soul. It quietly nudges us, underpins our acts of kindness, it is gentle, patient and all those other qualities that we associate with the Spirit. Its ultimate direction of travel is the reconciliation of all in the oneness of the love of God.

The ego nature is quite the opposite as it's driven by a strong agenda of self serving. It is loud, grasping, only interested in what it can get, have and achieve, in the material world in order to survive. The ego is the loudest of these two essences, it grabs our attention, demands action in the interest of self and the ever so subtle Christ essence can be drowned out by all the noise.

Generally speaking we see these 2 themes at work in our personal lives as well as at a collective level, where the global desire for justice, equality and peace are pitted against greed, prejudice, nationalism and intolerance. So life for us all then becomes a tension between these two but often when our survival is on the line - it is the ego that shouts the loudest.

Anyway, Jesus uses these parables to speak about this divine essence, a seed already existent in the ground of every soul. In the second of the two parables, He tells us that it is like a mustard seed. When sown upon the ground (the human soul) it is the smallest of all seeds on earth. So small we might say that we don't even know it's there, we are still 'asleep' to its existence.

But life is a journey of ups and downs of struggles and joys and somehow, during this roller coaster of life, which our ego tries to navigate in its own way, this divine 'seed' is quickened. We begin to awaken to its presence and sometimes it is the toughest of times that we go through a sudden awakening occurs and we discover that this God who we thought to be so remote and distant is the God who was always closer to us than our own breathing. That the sense of separation was nothing more than an illusion!

And then begins this conscious journey towards this seed growing and gradually blossoming drawing us inwards by the power of love so that we might become the very essence of that love. Or again to paraphrase Paul's words - *it is no longer we who live but Christ who lives in us*. The

ego no longer has the last say and our selfless giving becomes the essence of who we are.

As the parable of the mustard seed continues, the seed becomes one of the greatest of all shrubs. It puts forth large branches so that others can benefit. That birds are able to build their nests in its shade to use the metaphorical language of the parable. This is the activism that every seed in every soul has the potential to produce.

So how does this awakening happen, well as I said perhaps through a tragedy, perhaps a miracle happens in our lives or perhaps in the general search for some kind of meaning to our lives. But it is always God who awakens us. We can't make ourselves wake up. But what we can do is tend the ground of our soul which helps us to focus less on the egoic desires and instead waters the ground where the seed is planted.

Some practices that are recommended for nourishing the soil are

- Developing the art of being in the present moment or we might say taking a mindful approach to life.
- Learning to be present in nature in particular since creation is the first of the two books authored by God and equally inspiring as the second.
- Being less wordy in prayer so that you create some quiet space where you can listen for the still small voice.
- Taking quality time out to have a retreat or even go on a pilgrimage now and again.
- Noticing and giving thanks for God's infinite generosity that bombards every moment of you life
- Being kind and gracious in all your dealings with others.

Such practices nourish the soil of the soul and in this way an awakening begins within us that takes us on a journey of transformation for love's sake

that in the end all might know true reconciliation in the Oneness of the love of God.

Hymn StF 728

O', God, you search me, and you know me
All my thoughts lie open to your gaze
When I walk or lie down, you are before me
'Ever the maker and keeper of my days

You know my resting and my rising
You discern my purpose from afar
And with love everlasting, you besiege me
In ev'ry moment of life or death, you are

Before a word is on my tongue, Lord
You have known its meaning through and through
You are with me beyond my understanding
God of my present, my past and future, too

Although your Spirit is upon me
Still I search for shelter from your light
There is nowhere on Earth I can escape you
Even the darkness is radiant in your sight

For you created me and shaped me
Gave me life within my mother's womb
For the wonder of who I am, I praise you
Safe in your hands, all creation is made new.
Bernadette Farrell (b1957)
Based on Psalm 139

Prayers

(Reflective Music and a lit candle may be used during these prayers.)

Lord our God
For the greening of nature all around us as
summer unfolds;
We give you thanks.

For the colours in the hedgerows and the
blossoms on the trees;
We give you thanks.

For the songs of the birds as they offer up their
hymns of praise;
We give you thanks.

For the joy of newborn lambs gambolling in fields;
We give you thanks.

For the conversations that inspire us;
We give you thanks.

For family and friends who love and support us
especially in tricky times;
We give you thanks.

For your astonishing abundance bombarding us
with blessings in every moment of our lives;
We give you thanks

For Christ, the lover of the soul who's great
longing is that all might be reconciled to you in
your great love and longing for us;
We give you thanks. **Amen.**

And now in a time of silence we bring our prayers
for others and the intentions of our own hearts.

(A quiet time for personal prayer and reflection)

Our father who art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name;
Thy kingdom come;
Thy will be done;
On earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
But deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory,
Forever and ever
Amen

Hymn 51 StF Great is thy faithfulness

Great is thy faithfulness O God my Father

There is no shadow of turning with thee;
Love changes not thy compassions they fail not;
as thou has been thou forever will be.

(Refrain)

*Great is thy faithfulness! Great is thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see;
all I have needed thy hand has provided.
Great is thy faithfulness Lord unto me.*

Summer and winter and Springtime and harvest,
sun moon and stars in their courses above,
join with all nature in manifold witness
to thy great faithfulness, mercy and love.

(Refrain)

*Great is thy faithfulness! Great is thy
faithfulness!...*

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth
thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide;
strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,
blessings all mine with ten thousand beside!

(Refrain)

*Great is thy faithfulness! Great is thy
faithfulness!...*

Thomas O, Chisholm (1866-1960)

Blessing

You are all called to travel on the same road and
in the same direction, so stay together, both
inwardly and outwardly. You have one
Master...One God and Father of all, who rules
over all, works through all, and is present in all. So
let everything you are and think and do be
permeated with this Oneness.

Amen

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Worship prepared
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